

## MISCELLANEOUS.

### JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE.

Goethe the Darwinist before Darwin, the positivist before August Comte, the naturalist among bards, and the bard among naturalists, is perhaps the clearest of all the prophets of the Religion of Science. There may be others as great as he in other fields, as in the natural sciences, in special philosophy, in the practical arts, or in sociology, but there is certainly none greater than he as a poet and a sage. His religion is as broad as the whole cosmos, not excluding Christianity, but including it and all other religions, accepting their truths from a higher plane, from the cosmopolitan standpoint of the scientific inquirer. The narrow pulpitist looked upon Goethe as an infidel and a negative spirit, but Goethe replied that he had a faith too. He said :

"Ye faithful, do not claim that your confession  
Be truth alone : for we have faith like you.  
Science can't be deprived of the possession  
Belonging to the world, and to me too."

[Ihr Gläubigen ! rühmt nur nicht euern Glauben  
Als einzigen : wir glauben auch wie ihr ;  
Der Forscher lässt sich keineswegs berauben  
Des Erbtheils, aller Welt gegönnt—und mir.]

Goethe's *Faust* with all its shortcomings is one of the grandest poems of mankind, not inferior to the *Mahabharata*, *Hesiod*, *Homer*, or the *Divina Comedia*. And it is as much religious poetry as the book of *Job*. It teaches a lesson, pointing out the way of salvation, which is not obtained by a belief in the word, not by the theories of thought, not by reliance on a power, but solely by courageous, self-done deeds. In translating the New Testament *Faust* says :

"'Tis written : 'In the Beginning was the *Word*.'  
Here am I balked : who, now, can help afford ?  
The *Word* ?—impossible so high to rate it ;  
And otherwise must I translate it,  
If by the Spirit I am truly taught.  
Then thus : 'In the Beginning was the *Thought*.  
The first line let me weigh completely,  
Lest my impatient pen proceed too fleetly.  
Is it the *Thought* which works, creates, indeed ?  
'In the Beginning was the *Power*,' I read.  
Yet, as I write, a warning is suggested,  
That I the sense may not have fairly tested.

The Spirit aids me : now I see the light !  
 ' In the Beginning was the *Deed*,' I write."

—*Trans. by Bayard Taylor.*

Goethe's God, it is true, is not the God of the masses, he is not an individual, but more than any possible individual, however great. Goethe said in reply to those who accused him of pantheism :

" Why do you scoff and scout,  
 About the All and One.  
 The professor 's a person, no doubt,  
 God is none."

[Was soll mir euer Hohn  
 Ueber das All und Eine?  
 Der Professor ist eine Person,  
 Gott ist keine.]

Goethe's God is the eternal rest of law in the unrest of the eternal changes of the world's life ; the sameness in the apparent irregularity, the necessity in haphazard happenings, the cosmic order of the universal in the evolution of infinite particulars. He says :

" When in the infinite appeareth  
 The same eternal repetition,  
 When in harmonious coalition  
 A mighty dome its structure reareth ;  
 A rapture thrills through all existence  
 All stars, or great or small, are blessed,  
 Yet all the strife and all resistance  
 In God, the Lord's eternal rest."

[Wenn im Unendlichen dasselbe  
 Sich wiederholend ewig fiesst,  
 Das tausendfältige Gewölbe  
 Sich kräftig in einander schliesst,  
 Strömt Lebenslust aus allen Dingen,  
 Dem kleinsten wie dem grössten Stern,  
 Und alles Drängen, alles Ringen  
 Ist ewige Ruh in Gott dem Herrn.]

Goethe's psychology, which anticipates all the main practical results of modern investigation, has been the subject of a special article,<sup>1</sup> and we need only add that Goethe while denying the ego-soul, recognised the importance of immortality both as a factor in the world which explains the evolution of life as the product of treasured up souls and as an ideal whose influence upon practical ethics is paramount. Life is transient, but it is our duty to overcome the transiency of life. He says :

" Drop all transiency  
 What'er be its claim.  
 Ourselves to immortalise,  
 That is our aim."

[Nichts vom Vergänglichlichen,  
 Wie's auch geschah !  
 Uns zu verewigen  
 Sind wir ja da.]

Goethe was one of those rare exceptions on whom fate had bestowed almost all the blessings that ever fall to the lot of mortals. He walked on the heights of life

<sup>1</sup> "Goethe a Buddhist," *The Open Court*, No. 445.

and yet saw enough of its tribulations and anxieties to prevent him from falling a prey to shallowness. He was as great as he was happy, and as gifted as successful. He added treasures to the spiritual heirloom of our ancestors that will remain valuable possessions of mankind for all time to come.

P. C.

## BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTES.

GRAINS OF SENSE. By *V. Welby*. London: J. M. Dent & Co. 1897. Pp. 146.

The distinguished authoress of this pretty little volume has devoted much thought to that department of philosophy which deals with the significance of words, and been instrumental in many ways in the furthering of research designed to lead to the clarification of language. The students of correct expression will welcome therefore the appearance of the booklet, which we may say contains in a popular but exact form the philosophical confession of faith of Lady Welby. The great spiritual and practical need of the times, according to the authoress, is to develop immensely the power of significant communication between mind and mind, as distinguished from the physical mechanisms of communication. 'We encourage geographical explorers; let us extend the conception and encourage explorers of the expression-world, sending out well-equipped expeditions into the polar regions of meaning. Let us have laboratories of experimental language. We have already shorthand; let us have short-tongue and short-mind—a larger proportion of meaning to expression, more economy in words, more fulness of thought. To this end, the further application of the principle of the alphabet is suggested, the aid of indicative symbols, typographic or pen gesture on the analogy of mouth-gesture, symbolic art-words composed of art-letters, etc., etc. The enormous time which we spend on learning the spelling of the English language is contrasted with the little time or no time which we spend on acquiring the meanings of the language and in giving precision to these meanings. The way to a rational spelling-reform is pointed out and the potency of the English language as a world-speech after appropriate modification is emphasised. *Apropos* of the wranglings of purists and cranks over reforms in orthography we have the following sense-laden words: "So rigid about the letter and so lax about the spirit: so careful of the petty points of fashion, so careless of the greater points of import: so jealous for the sanctities of convention, so tolerant of the desecration of the inner shrines of speech: so fastidious on what signifies less, and so indifferent on what most of all signifies,—Significance."

We agree perfectly with the general opinions advanced by the authoress. Surely the present development of civilised language is "arbitrary in the bad sense, and capricious, casual, incoherent, chaotic," but considering the invention of printing, the advantages of popular education, and the tremendous increase in the speaking and writing population of modern times, it is hardly more so than it was in the past. The authoress is too hard on "bulls." All living language is built on the corpses of dead bulls. The bulls of the past are the classic expressions of the present. It is not likely that the rustic clowns of ages gone by, from whose speech the creators of literary language must have drawn their material, were less prolific in the delivery of bulls than the unthinking and superficially educated public of to-day. That colossal bull of the French language, the double negative,